

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 02836 01 OF 02 171310Z  
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00  
PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 DODE-00 MCT-01 ACDA-12  
/062 W

-----129849 171334Z /50

P 170507Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8053  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
USINT BAGHDAD  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
USLO RIYADH  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 2836

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1,4  
TAGS: PINT, PINR, SY  
SUBJ: INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. SUMMARY: THERE APPEARS TO BE MOVEMENT UNDER THE SURFACE IN SYRIA AS THE REGIME CONTEMPLATES TRANSFERRING A NUMBER OF KEY MILITARY OFFICERS AND SHIFTING SEVERAL PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS. A RECENT ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST MINTRANSPORT SALIM YASSIN AND TEMPORARY ABDUCTION OF REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER AHMAD AL-HASSAN'S TWELVE-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER INDICATE THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD HAS NOT SOLVED HIS INTERNAL PROBLEMS BY REMOVING NAJI JAMIL. THESE TWO INCIDENTS SEEM DIRECTED AGAINST REF'AT AL-ASSAD AND MAY BE AN INDICATION THAT RIF'AT IS ONCE AGAIN TRYING TO FURTHER HIS POWER BASE IN THE PARTY, MILITARY, AND GOVERNMENT TO THE DISMAY OF PRACTICALLY EVERYONE EXCEPT PERHAPS THE PRESIDENT. END SUMMARY.

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2. INDEPENDENT SOURCES TOLD DATT AND POLOFF AND BRITISH EMBOFF THAT ROTATION IS UNDERWAY IN TOP ECHELONS OF SYRIAN ARMED FORCES. ACCORDING TO THESE REPORTS, MAJ GENERAL TAWFIQ JUHNI, 1ST ARMORED DIVISION COMMANDER, IS BEING TRANSFERRED TO AN UNKNOWN POSITION IN GHQ; MAJ GENERAL ALI ASLAN, COMMANDER OF SYRIAN FORCES IN LEBANON, AND COL. HAMUD FAYYAD, A SUBORDINATE OF ASLAN, ARE BEING TRANSFERRED

FROM THEIR COMMAND. THE COS OF THE SOUTHERN COMMAND AND THE COMMANDER OF THE BRIGADE STATIONED IN HAMA ARE BEING BROUGHT BACK TO GHQ AND MISSILE DEFENSE COMMANDER MAJ GEN ALI SALIH MAY BE TAPPED. TO TAKE THE PLACE OF MAJ GEN IBRAHIM AL-HASSAN, AF COS WHO WAS IMMOBILIZED IN HIS RECENT PLANE ACCIDENT. OTHER UNIDENTIFIED OFFICERS ARE ALSO BEING TRANSFERRED. JUHNI IS A LOGICAL CANDIDATE FOR TRANSFER SINCE HIS PROMOTION TO MAJOR GENERAL LAST JANUARY AND ASLAN MAY BE INVOLVED IN THE REPORTED UPCOMING ROTATION OF TROOPS IN LEBANON. AT THIS POINT IT APPEARS THAT THE TRANSFERS, IF THEY INDEED TAKE PLACE, ARE PART OF A NORMAL ROTATION AND ARE NOT POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. THOUGH THEY MAY HAVE POLITICAL IMPORT.

3. UNOFFICIAL SOURCE TOLD POLOFF THAT TWO DAYS AGO PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS WERE BEING SHIFTED. POLOFF WILL ATTEMPT GET DETAILS FROM LOCAL ADMINISTRATION MINISTRY, MAY 17.

4. A USUALLY RELIABLE EMBASSY SOURCE SAID HIS SON AND MANY OF HIS SON'S COLLEAGUES HAD BEEN DUE TO COMPLETE THEIR ARMY SERVICE IN JANUARY BUT HAVE BEEN EXTENDED FOR AN INDETERMINATE PERIOD. A NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER TOLD US HE HAD ALSO BEEN EXTENDED WHEN HIS TOUR ENDED LAST WEEK. IN ADDITION, WE ARE TOLD THAT SOME RESERVISTS ARE CURRENTLY BEING CALLED UP TO ACTIVE DUTY. WE HAVE NOT HEARD OF ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS SELECTIVE STRENGTHENING OF THE ARMY OTHER THAN THE REPORT THAT IT MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE LEBANON SITUATION IN THE  
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WAKE OF THE FAYADIYYA AND AYN AL-RUMMANAH INCIDENTS AS WELL AS THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF THE SOUTH.

5. ACCORDING TO HIS BROTHER WHO IS AN OFFICER IN THE POLICE, THE NEW MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, SALIM YASSIN, WAS THE TARGET OF AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ABOUT A WEEK AGO. HE WAS DRIVING IN THE DAMASCUS AREA WHEN THE ATTEMPT WAS MADE. HE ESCAPED UNHARMED, BUT A BODYGUARD WAS WOUNDED. THE REPORT HAS BEEN VERIFIED THROUGH OTHER EMBASSY SOURCES. THIS INCIDENT MARKS A BREAK WITH THE ESTABLISHED PATTERN OF ASSASSINATIONS SINCE YASSIN IS A SUNNI, NOT AN ALAWITE. SPECULATION IS THAT HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE PRESIDENT'S BROTHER, RIF'AT, MAY HAVE LED TO HIS TARGETING.

6. WE HEARD THAT AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT WAS MADE ALSO AGAINST A SENIOR MILITARY OFFICER IN DAMASCUS ABOUT A WEEK AGO. THIS WAS THE REASON RIF'AT'S TROOPS WERE PUT ON ALERT FOR SIX DAYS. THE OSTENSIBLE REASON WAS RIF'AT'S DEPARTURE FROM DAMASCUS FOR TWO DAYS TO ATTEND HIS FATHER-IN-LAW'S FUNERAL IN QURDAHA. THIS REPORT MAY BE A DISTORTION OF THE ATTEMPT ON YASSIN RATHER THAN A SEPARATE INCIDENT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 2836

7. ANOTHER REPORT FROM TWO SOURCES OF BRITISH EMBASSY INDICATES THAT REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER AHMAD AL-HASSAN'S TWELVE-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER WAS ABDUCTED FOR FOUR HOURS BY UNIDENTIFIED INDIVIDUALS. THE GIRE WAS RELEASED UNHARMED. THE ABDUCTION WAS SUPPOSEDLY MEANT AS A WARNING. WE HAVE NOT HAD INDEPENDENT VERIFICATION OF THIS REPORT. AHMAD AL-HASSAN WAS BROUGHT INTO THE REGIONAL COMMAND BY RIF'AT AL-ASSAD IN 1975. HIS CONNECTION WITH RIF'AT IS THE LIKELY CAUSE OF THIS GRIM POLITICAL MESSAGE.

8. NO PERSONNEL CHANGES HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITHIN THE SECURITY SERVICES THAT WE ARE AWARE OF SINCE THE DECLINE OF NAJI JAMIL. SOME ARRESTS AND TRANSFERS APPARENTLY WERE CARRIED OUT IN THE AIR FORCE AT THAT TIME. JAMIL'S STATUS REMAINS UNCERTAIN WITH PERSISTENT REPORTS THAT HE IS UNDER SOME KIND OF LOOSE CONSTRAINT AND MAY FACE CHARGES OF DERELICTION OF DUTY IN RELATION TO THE ASSASSINATION OF  
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ALAWITES. WE HAVE SEEN JAMIL SEVERAL WEEKS AGO DRIVING FREELY AROUND THE TOWN WITHOUT ESCORT WHICH CASTS DOUBT ON THESE RUMORS.

9. DAMASCUS HAS TIGHTER SECURITY THAN NORMAL WITH HEAVIER PATROLS AND MORE HEAVILY ARMED GUARDS STATIONED AROUND SENSITIVE TARGETS. THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, HOWEVER, SEEMS QUIET. IN TRIPS TO ALEPPO, HOMS, HAMA, LATAKIA, AND TARTOUS OVER LAST FEW DAYS, POLOFF NOTICED PRACTICALLY NO SECURITY IN COMPARISON TO DAMASCUS.

10. ASSAD HAS CLEARLY NOT SOLVED HIS INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEMS BY DUMPING JAMIL THE ATTACK ON YASSIN, HOWEVER, WHILE HARDLY REASSURING TO THE PRESIDENT MAY TAKE SOME OF THE EDGE OFF THE CONFESSORIAL CHARACTER OF ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITY.

11. NEVERTHELESS, THE LATEST INCIDENTS SEEM TO BE TAKING ON AN ANTI-RIF'AT CHARACTER. THIS MAY BE A NATURAL OUTGROWTH OF STORIES WE HAVE HEARD THAT RIF'AT IS ONCE AGAIN TRYING TO INSERT HIS FOLLOWERS INTO KEY POSITIONS IN THE MILITARY, PARTY, AND GOVERNMENT. RIF'AT WANTS THE COMFORT OF CONTROL, BUT, ACCORDING TO THESE STORIES, DOES NOT WANT TO WORRY ABOUT POLICY--THIS HE IS HAPPY TO LEAVE TO HIS BIG BROTHER. IN SUM, THESE INDICATIONS POINT TO CONSIDERABLE TENSION UNDER THE SURFACE HERE. BUT AT THIS POINT WE CANNOT ESTIMATE HOW IMPORTANT OR WIDESPREAD ITS RAMIFICATIONS MAY BE. PELLETREAU

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## Message Attributes

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**Draft Date:** 17 may 1978  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Disposition Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
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